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ABSTRACT

Instructors' knowledge of linguistics can affect the way they teach writing. For example, in traditional linguistics, O. Jespersen's important contribution is his descriptive rather than prescriptive study of English in a historical context. Writing teachers influenced by Jespersen will place students in writing situations where they do not rely on their conscious attention to prescriptive rules but rather practice writing according to the norms of acceptable prose. In structural linguistics, L. Bloomfield's and C. C. Fries' form classes may influence teachers to describe words and word sequences according to their functions and position in sentences. While ideas from transformational-generative grammar may seem more remote to teaching writing, the concept of linguistic competence offers a good rationale for engaging students in writing tasks without offering them any prior, formal instruction in grammar. These connections between linguistic theories and teaching practices offer teachers a wealth of resources for creating writing pedagogies. One pedagogical model for writing that can help teachers plan their program is rooted in such linguistic theories as multidialectalism, code-switching, and sentence pattern analysis as well as in learning theories such as transfer learning, operant conditions, and sequencing. Such model building allows teachers to discover theories in writing education and translate them into justifiable teaching practices. (HOD)

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INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS AMONG WRITING THEORIES AND TEACHING PRACTICES

by

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INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS AMONG
WRITING THEORIES AND TEACHING PRACTICES

The major task to teach writing so that our teaching practices cause our students to write well may help us interpret this year's conference theme: "The Writer's World(s): Achieving Insight and Impact." Among the many challenges associated with this theme is the one which forces us to look inward as writing teachers in an effort to examine our teaching tasks and research foundations. For this knowledge tells us something about the ways we can effect the quality of our students' writing while our students' ability to write well may, in turn, help us measure the quality of our teaching. The challenge to teach writing effectively has two obvious dimensions: 1) It requires us to investigate theories from various disciplines that inform us as writing teachers, and 2) it requires us to extend those theories into teaching practices that get results.

While it is impossible to refer to all or even a significant portion of those theories that inform our teaching, an impressive history of writing education research provide examples of making the necessary connections between writing theories and teaching practices. Today, I would like to refer to some of those historical connections as a way of demonstrating the possibility for us to do likewise. And I would like to suggest further that our ability to build pedagogical models is one of the best instruments we have to meet this challenge.

The complex act of teaching writing from an informed basis forces us to recognize the gap that exists between writing theories and teaching practices. Yet, bridging this gap is a more difficult task than the metaphor suggests--especially when the theories look like a collage of linguistic,

psychological, and educational concepts while the practice of teaching students to write well is our single-minded goal. Since the real world is always more complex than any theory can account for, bridging the gap between theory and practice requires us, at some point, to take that leap from our sometimes messy network of multiple theories to making consequential decisions in real-life situations. This logic also holds true when the real situation is helping students think through the subject matter of their prose to make appropriate linguistic choices for producing acceptable copy. We therefore look to the academic disciplines for theories to inform us--to those disciplines that reveal something about the nature of language (Linguistics), the science/art of teaching (Education), and the cognitive and behavioral processes of language learning and performance (Psychology).

Before turning to some of the references that have informed our teaching practices in the history of writing education, let's consider how various theories from linguistics can affect our thinking about teaching writing: The subject of linguistics gives rise to thoughts about the scientific study of language, hence about grammar and grammars. As writing teachers we must understand the essential similarities and differences among the major descriptive grammars: traditional, structural, and transformational-generative, not because we necessarily think that if our writing students study these concepts they will consequently improve their writing, but because we who design and implement writing pedagogies either explicitly or implicitly base our decisions on our assumptions about language (Lester, 1970; Winterowd, 1976; Young, 1978). Descriptive linguistics can help us sort out our assumptions about the nature and

structure of language and specifically about writing. Historically, teachers have presented some of this grammar directly to students as a way of helping them understand and describe what they are doing in writing (cf. Roberts, 1956, 1958) even though the literature in writing education research repeatedly makes the point that no amount of formal grammar study improves writing (Fries, 1952; Thomas, 1965; Lester, 1970; O'Hare, 1973; Winterowd, 1976). Yet, the fathers of descriptive linguistics are progenitors of such writing educators as Paul Roberts, Kellog Hunt, Frank O'Hare, and others.

For example, in traditional linguistics, Jespersen's important contribution is his descriptive rather than prescriptive study of English in a historical context (1905, 1937), for while he discusses inflectional aspects of English, he does not insist that the English inflection be compared to the Latin inflection. In the spirit of Jespersen's approach to language, teachers may want to instill in students the norms of standard writing without making them norms for all uses and varieties of the English language. Teachers who adopt Jespersen's attitude are less likely to proselytize by teaching "school" grammar in their writing courses: parsing, pronoun declensions, verb conjugations, or comparisons of English structures to Latin models (Hook & Crowell, 1970)--all of which have no effect on writing improvement (Thomas, 1965). Instead writing teachers informed by Jespersen know it's best to place students in writing situations where they do not rely on their conscious attention to prescriptive rules but <u>practice writing</u> according to the norms of acceptable prose.

In structural linguistics, Bloomfield's and Fries' form classes (1933 & 1952) may influence teachers to describe words and word sequences according to their functions and positions in the sentence. For example, Paul Roberts

adapts substitution and slot-frame exercises (1956) from the structuralist form classes (Fries, 1952), which are particularly useful for sentence-level exercises centered on uses of the pronoun, the possessive, or subject-verb agreement. Also, the structuralist explanation of inflectional morphemes can form the basis for teaching the use of the possessive, subject-verb agreement, and verb tense inflections. And Fries's illustration of the basic senterce patterns (1952) may form a basis for laying out writing tasks in such sub-skills as subject-verb agreement where, before the writer can follow the agreement procedure, he must be able to isolate subject-verb pairs in all types of sentence patterns. Perhaps the most important contribution to developing teaching practices for writing is the structuralist discovery procedure called contrastive analysis, for teachers of writing may extend this concept to every writing exercise by contrasting informal and formal varieties of language, spoken and written forms of language, social and regional dialects, English and other modern languages.

While concepts from transformational-generative grammar may seem more remote to teaching writing, the notion of linguistic competence (Chomsky, 1957) is perhaps the best reason for engaging students in writing tasks without offering them any prior, formal instruction in grammar. For example, Frank O'Hare and the sentence combining researchers before him are often described as adaptors of transformational grammar. Yet O'Hare's greatest debt to transformational grammar is, as the title of his mongraph describes, teaching sentence combining without formal grammar instruction (O'Hare, 1973). In writing-production tasks, the student who is forced to rely on his innate knowledge of universal grammar rules, i.e., linguistic competence, must also

internalize grammar-specific rules (Slobin, 1971). The student is therefore required to make a series of decisions based on his linguistic competence as well as on his acquired use of the grammar-specific rules appropriate for the target dialect, standard writing.

The later linguistic theory of tagmemic analysis developed by Kenneth Pike (1959) has been the theoretical foundation for Richard Young and others who have followed him. For example, Rhetoric: Discovery and Change (1970) extends Pike's tagmemic analysis for teaching the rhetorical aspects of the composing process: invention of ideas, arrangement, style. This work "treats language (1) as one kind of human behavior and (2) as relevant only in relation to its setting (a) in nonverbal behavior and (b) in contexts of nonverbal things or events. . . Tagmemic theory insists . . . on studying language as a form-meaning composite" (Young, Becker, & Pike, 292-93) and in Young's work offers "procedures for controlling the process of writing" although it minimizes the treatment of sub-skills as "grammar, spelling, punctuation, and usage" (Young, Becker, and Pike, p. xiii).

All these examples of making connections between linguistic theories and teaching practices, whether they address the whole or parts of the composing process, provide us with a wealth of resources for understanding how we can use our knowledge of linguistics to create writing pedagogies of our own. And we should also not forget the equally important field of sociolinguistics, for selected sociolinguistic concepts may also influence the nature of the writing activities we provide for our students.

Communicative competence (Bauman, 1972), which accounts for the speaker's (writer's) ability to deal with social rules governing use, as well as concepts of code-switching (Gumperz, 1972), social variable rules

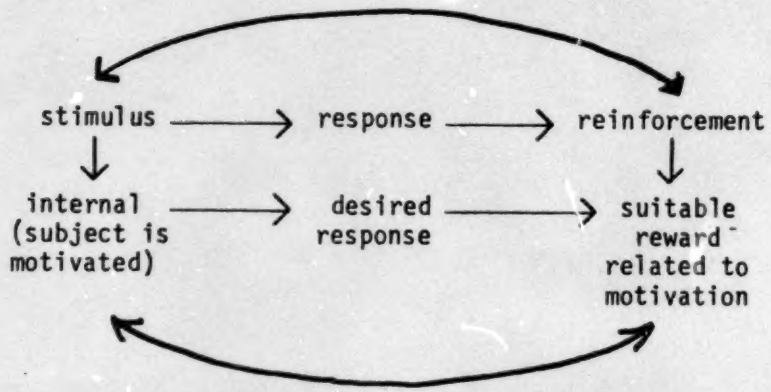
(Labov, 1972), and dialect (Fasold & Shuy, 1970; Wolfram & Fasold, 1974) should influence teaching practices in the same way that the generative concept of linguistic competence does. Effective teaching practices insure that the student is regularly reminded of dialectal differences while performing only in the target dialect, e.g., standard writing, that the student uses her acquired knowledge of social rules governing language to make appropriate choices and to take advantage of the available options. The student writer constantly employs code-switching to make the switch from her informal conversational dialect to the standard dialect used in writing. The student thereby develops the communicative competence (Bauman, 1972) to make the right choices in various kinds of scribal utterances (Skinner, 1957). For example, she may learn appropriate uses of the third person singular -s or -es inflection, the past tense -d or -ed inflection, and a number of appropriate punctuation habits. Thus, writing teachers who are knowledgeable in sociolinguistic concepts can structure their writing courses around them: Teachers may include multi-dialectal perspectives in writing tasks that call upon students' communicative competence and require students to make the kind of metaphoric switch (code-switching) necessary to move from one dialect and style to another.

Now let's turn to the specific connections made by Robert Zoellner, who uses a Skinnerian (psychological) theory as a basis for teaching writing and to Paul Roberts, who uses a Friesian (linguistic) theory. My point in referring to both Zoellner and Roberts is to illustrate that any extension of a theory for specified practical ends must alter the original theory to fit the new, real situation. Understanding this phenomenon is an important clarifier for those of you who may question the prudence of examining theories in the related disciplines of linguistics and psychology

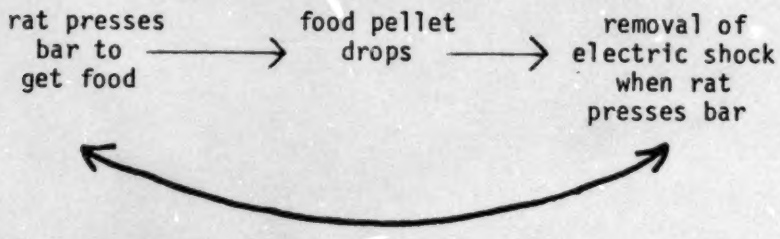
or who may doubt the value of extending any of these theories for pedagogical ends.

Robert Zoellner (1969) clarifies the meaning of the words "pedagogical adaptation" when he presents Skinner's behavioral model for teaching college composition. He asks writing teachers to consider the "Skinner box" for the college composition classroom "for the kinds of strategies which may be employed in making not an extrapolation /or direct application/--but an extension of learning principles" for teaching writing (p.293). Zoellner's precise distinction between extrapolation and extension is crucial to understanding the nature of his adaptation and the key to understanding our own.

B. F. Skinner's Reinforcement Schedule in the Skinner Box

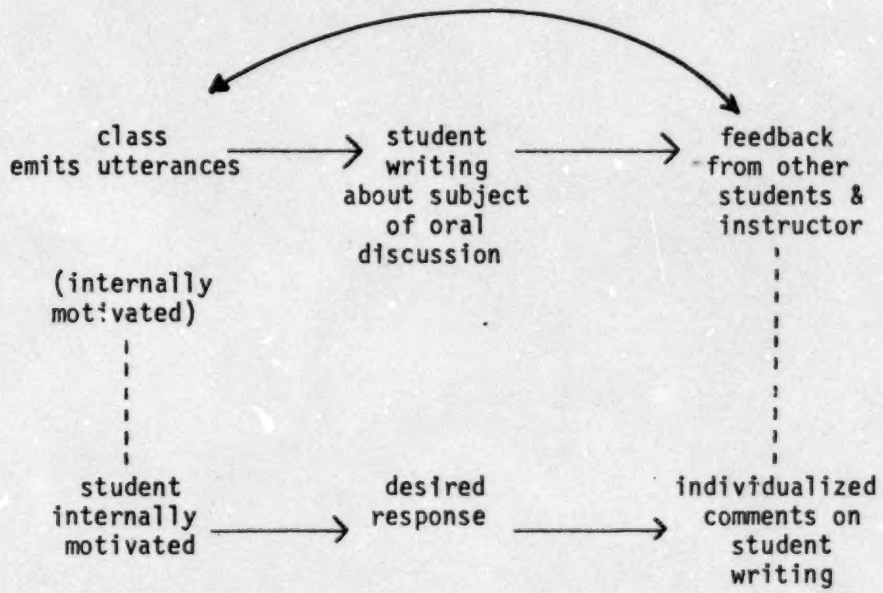


(e.g.)



Zoellner explains that "Skinner's box" must be somewhat altered for human conditioning. After all, writing students are not conditioned in the same way as Skinner's rats. The student writer's rewards consist of regular feedback--of social approval from her peer editors and mostly from her teachers' positive evaluations of her writing.

Robert Zoellner's Extension
of the Skinner Box for
a Talk-Write Pedagogy in Composition



According to Zoellner's extension of Skinnerian conditioning to the composition classroom, the student writer internalizes the reinforcement through what Albert Bandura calls cognitive mediation: "Thus, reinforcement, as it has become better understood, has changed from a mechanical strengthener of conduct to an informative and motivating influence" (Bandura, 1974, p. 860). The internalized reinforcement of the student writer is therefore different from the external rewards of food pellets mechanically reinforced for the experimental rats in "Skinner's box." Thus Skinnerian conditioning, as it is extended by Zoellner, has one function not defined before Zoellner. What this shows teachers of writing is that theories like Skinnerian conditioning can be extended to develop

pedagogies in writing without sacrificing the cognitive dimensions of writing and without reducing the Skinnerian (operant) conditioning practices to the absurdity of classical conditioning practices of the Pavlovian-dog ilk.

Skinnerian Principles
incorporated in
Talk-Write Pedagogy

1. Concentration on act of writing
2. Pedagogical exploitation of verbal repertory--both vocal and scribal
3. Class environment structured to permit innumerable scribal responses
4. A pedagogical situation which permits immediate reinforcement of those aspects of scribal activity representing functional improvement
5. Classroom techniques for developing chained sub-specifications of acceptable scribal activity

Unlike Zoellner, Paul Roberts (1958) extends a linguistic rather than a psychological theory for use in the college composition classroom. By using the syntactic patterns described by the structuralists, namely the English sentence patterns classified by Charles Fries (1952), Roberts extends Fries' model to develop a pedagogical (school) grammar. In The Structure of English (1952) Fries employs "test frames" by which real English words are plugged into the appropriate slots of the four form classes, function words, and sentence-pattern types according to their morphological makeup, function, and position in the sentence. Roberts extends Fries' "test frames" to develop for his students "slot-frame exercises" through which students plug in words in their appropriate slots and thereby learn grammatical definitions of words not according to the traditional, meaning-based definitions of parts of speech but according to the structural analysis of their morphological features, functions, and positions in English sentences.

Examples of Charles Fries'
"Test Frames"

Members of Class 1 are, by definition,
all the words that fit into the
blank positions in these three
test frames

5. Frame A: (The) _____ is/was good.

(The) _____s are/were good.

6. Frame B: (The) _____ remembered (the) _____.

7. Frame C: (The) _____ went there.

--from Fries, The Structure of English,
pp. 78-79

Example of Paul Roberts'
Pattern Exercises
Extending Fries' Theory

The _____ was interesting.

Did you see their _____?

It was full of _____.

--from Understanding English
(1958), p. 152

As in Zoellner's adaptation of the Skinner box, here too Roberts' adaptation of the Friesian theory transforms the theory into something else in order to fulfill a prescriptive rather than the descriptive purpose of structural grammar. Roberts presents this pedagogical grammar to college writing students so that they get "a better understanding of /their/ language, a better understanding of writing, a better understanding of /themselves/ in the community of writers" (Roberts, 1958, p. xi). Roberts' adaptation shows teachers of writing that structural linguistics is adaptable to pedagogical exercises even though we may, and rightly should, question the effectiveness of grammatical exercises as a way to improve writing.

What all of this points to is that we writing teachers need tools to think with as we establish appropriate pedagogical practices for our writing students. One of these tools, which the more recent researchers in the composing process suggest, is the use of models. In the writing education research thus far, model is a term generally used to describe a writer's cognitive functions during the composing process. A model is therefore defined as "first and foremost a tool for researchers to think with" (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p. 375). As of yet models have not been used to describe both the teaching of writing and the writing process itself. I suggest, however, that we extend the present definition of the term model to include descriptions of teaching writing as well as of composing itself. As such, these models can provide teachers with plans for a range of concerns that the more common lesson plans and teaching objectives cannot accommodate.

In this context a pedagogical model is not a sample of something to be imitated; nor is it a plastic imitation of the real thing. Rather a pedagogical model for writing points to teaching practices and writing activities appropriate for real-world classrooms and individualized instruction

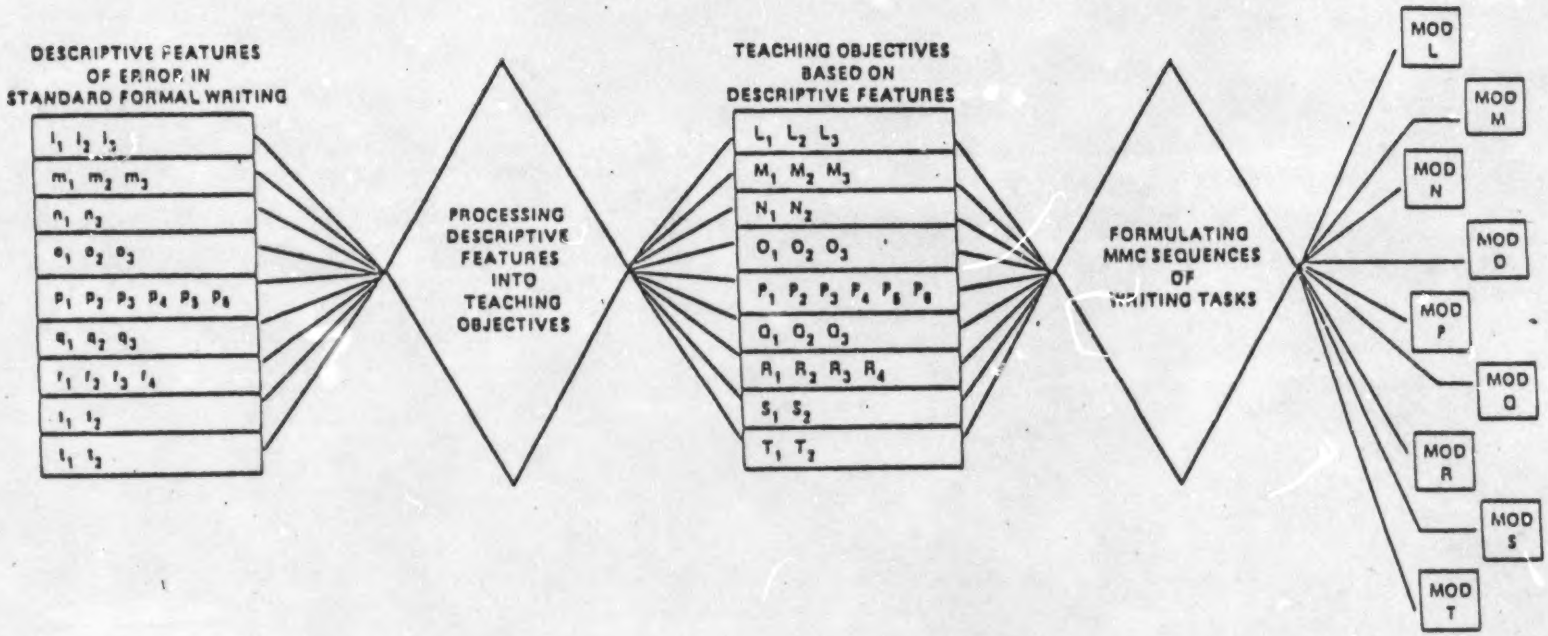
in writing. As teaching writing is increasingly aided by a variety of instructional technologies, most recently by computers and video communication systems (Lacy, 1982), we are increasingly pressed to understand the theories that affect our teaching. Moreover, we are being forced to think through the connections betweer our writing theories and teaching practices. A pedagogical model for writing can help us bridge the gap between theory and practice; a pedagogical model can serve as a planning tool for writing teachers to think with. My purpose in presenting my pedagogical model today is to encourage writing teachers to move in that direction.

My pedagogical model is one for teaching selected sub-skills in writing; it is itself a bridge between theory and practice. It is rooted in such linguistic theories as multidialectalism, code-switching, and sentence-pattern analysis as well as in such learning theories as transfer learning, operant conditioning, and sequencing.

Teachers who use this pedagogical model or build ones of their own similar to it will not attempt to deal with all the parts of the composing process at the same time but will isolate and focus on selected skills and sub-skills within it. Ideally, the resultant teaching practices will help students acquire the needed skills in those areas defined by the writing teacher. It is my hope that as writing teachers learn more about the problems of writing (Shaughnessy 1977; Emig, 1978), we will find model building to be a useful planning tool for the writing education we provide. Models which focus on selected parts of writing must be placed in the larger context of other models which account for the whole complex skill we call composing (Kinneavy, 1979). Here is a graphic depiction of my pedagogical model:

FIGURE G

A Pedagogical Model for
Teaching Writing



Any teacher who evaluates teaching practices or student materials derived from a pedagogical model must presuppose that the model builder has worked through the various steps needed to help students solve the selected writing problems. In the instance of this model there are two stages: The first stage requires the builder to process student writing errors: 1) by providing appropriate linguistic descriptions of errors discovered in writing education research, 2) by subdividing categories of errors according to distinguishing linguistic or rhetorical traits, 3) by maintaining a positive attitude toward errors in order to find clues for pedagogical design, and 4) by formulating realistic teaching objectives based on those clues. The second stage requires the formulation of instructional sequences, here MMC sequences, that yield practices for teaching writing. In this case the vehicle of instruction is specified as separable modules.

Models for teaching writing are useful planning tools. They suggest practical exercises for teachers to use in the classroom, and they can serve as blueprints for the development of student materials. Model building requires the builder to identify specific writing problems and process those problems to find clues for pedagogical designs. But most importantly, model building allows us as teachers to discover our theories in writing education and translate them into pedagogies we can justify. These pedagogies may then lead to the development of teaching practices that will help our students not only write well but perhaps write even better.

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